

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Beth Newburger, Board Member, Women's History Project

National Museum of American History, Behring Center

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Women's History Month media sponsor

## TO LEARN MORE

National Archives

<http://www.archives.gov>

National Association of Black Military Women

<http://hometown.aol.com/khnabmw/myhomepage/>

National Women's History Project

<http://www.nwhp.org>

Smithsonian Women's History Month Schedule of Events

<http://educate.si.edu/heritage/>

National Museum of American History, Behring Center

<http://americanhistory.si.edu>

Celebrating Traditions—Creating Connections through the Arts  
Women's History Month 2002  
Opening Event



Melodie L. C. Thompson

An Excerpt from

## *Only a Woman: Female Buffalo Soldier Cathay Williams*

Written and Performed  
by Melodie L. C. Thompson

Friday, March 1, 12 noon  
National Museum of American History, Behring Center  
Carmichael Auditorium



Smithsonian  
Institution

## PROGRAM

### *Welcome*

Rebekah Yeagley  
Chair, Smithsonian Institution Women's Council

### *Performance*

An excerpt from  
*Only A Woman: Female Buffalo Soldier Cathay Williams*  
Written and performed by Melodie L. C. Thompson  
Music composed and performed by Paul and Elise Mancini

Setting: Cathay Williams's home in Pueblo, Colorado, circa 1870

*Only a Woman*, which tells the story of Cathay Williams's life, exemplifies this year's National Women's History Month theme: Women Sustaining the American Spirit. The play is an interactive performance piece. You, the audience, have entered Cathay's home, and she will talk directly to you. She may even solicit responses. Please feel free to play along.

### *Discussion*

## CATHAY WILLIAMS

When Cathay Williams enlisted in the United States Army in 1866, women were not allowed to serve as soldiers. So she posed as a man and joined the Thirty-Eighth Infantry, becoming the first and only known female Buffalo Soldier.

Williams was born into slavery in Independence, Missouri, in 1842. She worked as a house slave until the Civil War began and Union soldiers freed her. She then became a cook and laundress for the Union Army. She witnessed the Shenandoah Valley raids in Virginia, and traveled to places as far reaching as Iowa, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

After the war, Congress passed legislation establishing two African American cavalry and four African American infantry regiments, which later became known as the Buffalo Soldiers. They were sent west to join the army's fight with the Indians. Williams enlisted under the name William Cathay and served for two years with the Buffalo Soldiers, who were noted for their discipline, perseverance, and bravery. When asked why she went to such great lengths to serve in the army, she said, "I wanted to make my own living and not be dependent on relations or friends."

Melodie L. C. Thompson, a writer, teacher, actor, and storyteller, has a degree in drama, and has studied American sign language and dance. Since leaving full-time teaching in 1995, she has performed at schools, festivals, museums, and small theaters. She is recognized by the National 9th and 10th Cavalry Association as the first actor/playwright to honor Cathay in an original play production.

